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## THE POSITION OF FAITH IN THE JEWISH RELIGION.

WHAT do we mean by the word "faith"? It is sometimes objected to employ this term in connection with Judaism. Is Judaism a faith, or is it only a code of rules and regulations? This question is one of great consequence to the future of Judaism. Faith is one of those words which have many meanings, and it is therefore essential, for the purpose of making these observations clear, to state what is here meant by the expression. Let us then define faith in two ways—first, as a faculty by which mankind is able to apprehend truths which do not lie completely within the sphere of ordinary demonstration; and secondly, as applied to Judaism, the word is to represent the particular body of truths which compose that part of Judaism which does not lie within the sphere of demonstration. This kind of statement seems necessary, because Judaism contains much that does appeal to the ordinary methods of understanding. A vast number of its rules and regulations can be reasonably justified by the common test of expediency and practical utility. But there is yet behind all these a group of ideas which cannot be explained in the same way. Throughout the Pentateuch and the Bible generally, not to mention the entire range of literature which has gathered round it and holds a place of sacred authority in the minds of most Jews, there are ideas and views which must necessarily be called dogmas.

It will be obvious to which set of thoughts I refer. The belief in God, and in the moral perfection of God, and in the doctrine of man having been created in the divine image; and then again the election of Israel, and Israel having peculiar relations to God and to the world—all these are matters that stand out quite apart from other things which belong to Judaism, such as the latter six of the ten commandments, the dietary laws, and numerous other regulations, all of which appeal straightway to our common sense

rather than to this faculty of faith. There is no doubt that Judaism, as understood by a large majority of adherents, contains rules and regulations so numerous and minute, that they appear almost to stand in the place which, in the case of Christianity, is filled by faith. Faith in other creeds means something more than the apprehension of truths that lie outside the sphere of ordinary demonstration. The difference in this respect between the claims of faith in the case of Judaism and in the case of Christianity is that in Judaism it assumes only what is not inconsistent with reason, though logically undemonstrable ; whereas in Christianity faith claims a function altogether independent of reason, and sometimes hostile to it. The propositions contained in the Athanasian creed are all more or less capable of being submitted to the tribunal of reason or logical test. Reason and logic can say Aye or Nay to the question as to whether there can be three undivided parts in one uncompounded whole. Yet faith here claims to be the sole arbiter of the question. But in the case of Judaism reason can neither affirm or deny the presence of a Divine Being, nor the other propositions which grow out of that one. The ordinary methods of logical test and demonstration have nothing whatever to say to assertions of this kind. And it is precisely these matters with which faith in the case of Judaism is called into exercise. Wherever there is a point in which mathematical or other demonstration is possible, faith has no function in Judaism. For this reason a Jew can, consistently with his adherence to Judaism, accept every fully established teaching of literary criticism in respect to the interpretation of Scripture, and in regard to the notions of miracles, whereas the strict adherent of Christianity in any of its forms cannot do so. Faith in regard to Judaism and faith in regard to Christianity have different claims, and do not hold in all respects quite the same place. But it is none the less true that Judaism without faith is as unreal as Christianity without it. Judaism is quite as dependent upon faith as Christianity is, although its faith has other claims, and in no case conflicts with reason. The fundamental teaching and profession of Judaism in Deut. vi. 4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, etc.," is one that could bring neither comprehension nor acceptance without at once making a claim upon the faculty of faith. To a man without faith, such a command could convey no meaning. It is quite otherwise with many other statements and commands contained in the Pentateuch. "Thou shalt not steal," or "Thou shalt not kill," are perfectly intelligible to a person whose

faith is entirely dormant, and might be obeyed without reference to the faculty of faith.

Professor Graetz, in his instructive article in the first number of this Review, wrote: "In order not to mistake the essential characteristics of Judaism, one must not regard it as a *faith*, or speak of it as 'the Jewish faith.' The application of a word is by no means unimportant. The word often becomes a net, in which thought gets tangled unawares. From an ecclesiastical standpoint, the word 'faith' implies the acceptance of an inconceivable miraculous fact, insufficiently established by historical evidence, and with the audacious addition *credo quia absurdum*. Judaism has never required such a belief from its adherents." True! but would it not have been more explicit if Professor Graetz had gone on to state that the *credo quia absurdum* was just the difference between the use of the word *faith* in the two different systems of Christianity and Judaism, rather than to have expunged the word altogether? For on another page he proceeds to explain that "the positive side (of Judaism) is to regard the highest Being as one and unique, and as the essence of all ethical perfections, and to worship it as the Godhead—in a single word, monotheism in the widest acceptation of the term." Then he goes on to remind us that the divine perfection gives the ideal for the moral life. "'Be ye holy, even as I am holy,' is the perpetually recurring refrain in the oldest records of Judaism," says Professor Graetz. To what faculty then of the human mind does this "idea of divine perfection" appeal if not to the faculty of *faith*? And what is the belief in the Supreme Being at all, and in the "ideal for the moral life," if it be not a *faith*? Surely to deny the use of the term "faith" in such a case as this is to rob our vocabulary of the only word which can adequately express our meaning. It is just possible that the aversion of Professor Graetz and other Jews less scholarly to the use of the word *faith* in connection with Judaism may be accounted for by two considerations. First, on account of the different use to which the term is applied in Christianity. Faith there is made to reconcile propositions that are so much at variance with the Jewish religion that there may be a lurking fear that if "faith" is once admitted into the Jewish vocabulary it may serve to raise up dogmas that are opposed to Judaism. Surely the more satisfactory way of dealing with the question is to define clearly what the special province of *faith* is in regard to Judaism, and thus to present the clear contrast between its functions in the two systems. Secondly, what may be called the religious genius of the Jewish race may

induce people to mistake the true cause for their acceptance of truths which do not lie within the sphere of ordinary demonstration. The beliefs in the Supreme Being and in the election of Israel are so deeply rooted in the Jewish mind that it may be supposed that these two propositions are acceptable to the Israelite by mere intuition or hereditary mental habit, and have been acquired by the individual Jew without any reference to the exercise of the faculty called faith. That, however, appears to be a somewhat loose way of getting rid of precise terms, and is altogether a shifting of the ground. It would be much more accurate to say that faith is a faculty with which the Israelite appears to be endowed in such a remarkable degree that the dogmas of his race present themselves with so much force that they look like axioms, and seem to be imbibed from his birth without any extraordinary effort at seeking to believe. That, no doubt, is true, as to the mental assent which nearly every born Israelite seems to give to certain propositions. But what shall we say about the application of those beliefs throughout the history of Israel, and throughout an individual career? There is something more than credulity required to make particular propositions, like the existence of the Supreme Being, and the relation of man to God, act as living forces upon human character. Here something is called into action which cannot be expressed in the English language by any other word than "faith." It is something much more than the intellectual process of belief that has led so many thousands of Jews to die for Judaism. No mere mental process would reconcile millions of men to lives of oppression and martyrdom, and still less would any opinion have the force about it to give them the necessary endurance and patience under all kinds of suffering. Something is called into exercise which is fraught with saving power, something that has in it not only the intellectual element of assenting to or dissenting from certain statements, but the higher or spiritual quality which we recognise as love and devotion. Faith is the exact and only word which conveys all this meaning, and my contention is that it is at least as tremendous a factor in Judaism as it is in Christianity.

In order to appreciate the true value of faith as a factor of Judaism, it is necessary to contrast the two distinct functions which it is intended to perform in regard to Judaism, and in regard to Christianity. The reason for this necessity arises from the fact that popular notions attach certain meanings to words which do not always represent their exact significance. Faith is popularly supposed to do service by reconciling the

supernatural or the miraculous, and in this sense Professor Graetz is right when he defines it "from an ecclesiastical standpoint" as the word which "implies the acceptance of an inconceivable miraculous fact, insufficiently established by historical evidence." In this respect faith has an enormous province in Christianity, whereas in Judaism it has none. Christianity is structurally founded upon "an inconceivable miraculous fact," and Judaism is not so founded. Miracle belief is a necessity in Christian theology, but it is by no means indispensable in Hebrew theology.

Professor Graetz appears to have fallen into the not uncommon error of dismissing a particular term because that term has many applications, some of which are not those that Judaism requires. I have thus attempted to show what Judaism does not require of faith. Let us now see the part that faith has to take in the Jewish Religion. First the very apprehension of the Supreme Being is an act of faith; secondly the conviction that the Supreme Being has decreed that one particular group of people shall be for all time his "Kingdom of Priests" or "Holy Nation" for some special purpose is another act of faith. And here faith becomes transformed, as it were, from a passive to an active state. The Israelite being convinced much more by faith than by mere reason that he is in actual fellowship with a commission divinely appointed, his life is conducted entirely with reference to that commission, and nothing but faith enables him so to conduct himself. Here the idea of faith as an abstract word becomes the name of a particular factor in human nature, and is thence a virtue. It embraces within itself many other virtues. It creates or calls into play virtues that were otherwise hidden or inactive. As an example it is pregnant with courage, with hope, with patience, with determination, with self-sacrifice, sometimes with inventive power, and in its highest form, beginning from the starting point of the sacred commission, it fructifies into an enthusiasm of humanity—that is a love of mankind, an unquenchable desire to labour for the good of fellow men. Such an enthusiasm as this Jewish faith is capable of working is the exact reverse of what it might vulgarly be supposed to have commenced from. The separateness of race and the thought of God having made a particular choice, bear a totally different colour under the elevating influences of faith. The separateness means distinct obligations specially incumbent, and the particular choice signifies one out of the many ways of Providence for bestowing good and blessings upon mankind. To the mind of a strictly religious Jew, the history of his race presents one

vast spectacle of a discipline, namely, the discipline of faith. From the bondage in Egypt to the wandering in the desert, and from the destructions of the two Temples, the exile and the dispersion, to the latest sufferings in South-Eastern Europe, he traces the hand of God refining him in the furnace of affliction, and perpetually equipping him with a greater and holier gift of that which he considers the highest of all gifts, namely, the gift of faith. This is the most impressive illustration of the power of faith which history has yet supplied. The history of the Jewish race is the history of faith in a sense more remarkable and striking than any other history. Faith as a great human virtue is thus exalted in the life of Israel, and stands out as the most brilliant example to mankind. So far from Judaism being without the factor of faith it rather appears to be the one Religion of all others in which faith in the sense of a virtue—not a mere mental process—plays the fullest part. Where is there faith so highly developed as that which enables the European Jew of the nineteenth century to see in a record of thirty-three centuries of the most varied and varying detail—one unbroken continuity, one unbaffled plan, a single destiny, an eternal truth?

Since writing the foregoing, I have had the advantage of reading the luminous article on "English Judaism," by Mr. Israel Zangwill, in the July number of this Review. That article appears to be a comprehensive survey of the numerous different conceptions of Judaism which Mr. Zangwill has observed among his fellow Israelites in England. He has tabulated these conceptions under thirty-two different labels. Perhaps that is a needless multiplication, seeing that some of them lie outside Judaism altogether, and that many of them, according to the very labels employed, are no conceptions at all. With regard to Mr. Zangwill's multiplication of labels, it might be observed that his industry in that direction could have been spared if he had made the simple observation that there is a vast variety in human temperament, and there are many shades of mental and spiritual character among all men, and, therefore, that no two men see things exactly in the same way. But the object of my reference to that article here is, that it being an impartial essay on the question, "What is Judaism?" written with large resources of information, and conceived throughout with critical power, I regard it as a valuable confirmation of my own proposition, that faith is an indispensable factor of Judaism, and that a particular kind of faith is its special and distinguishing characteristic. The apparent despondency as to the future of Judaism with which Mr. Zangwill's paper concludes does

not appear to me to be the necessary result of his investigations. Nor am I convinced by his arguments, on page 400, that the transition of Jewish conceptions from one age to another, and from one mind to another, does either "historically" or "logically" suggest a change of name, because that very characteristic faith belonging to and distinguishing Judaism is of a kind which indicates the singular power of adaptability inherent in it. If Judaism were only a code of regulations and not a faith, it would hardly be necessary to despond about its future now, because it could not have lasted beyond a very limited period, and then only within quite restricted conditions. It is just because it was a faith, and pre-eminently a faith above all things, that it has endured up to the present—not only over a vast span of time, but under numerous different conditions of extraordinary and exceptional variety. Where there is no faith, that is no spark of trust and confidence in the divine purpose respecting Israel, the Jewish religion is undistinguishable, even though there is ample evidence of racial identity. On the other hand, where there is this faith, that unquenchable thirst for the waters of spiritual life, together with the unshaken conviction that the "Guardian of Israel slumbers not nor sleeps," the Jewish religion may be equally recognised in the minyan room of a Polish city, or in the "reformed" synagogue of Western Europe. The unity of Israel is established by reason of that common faith far more than by the uniformity of traditional observances. Here, again, Mr. Zangwill has shown that so-called "orthodox" adherence to ceremonialism may be observed among Jews of different opinions upon religion itself. In other words, religious diversity is possible with ritual resemblance. Diversity in ritual practice is surely of much less consequence to the future of Judaism than diversity in religious conviction. It can truly be said that some of the worst Jews are among the most observant, but it cannot be said that the best Jews are among those who have no religious convictions and are without faith. From the first calling of Abraham to be the father of a great nation, in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed, to the sanctification of the emancipated groups at the foot of Sinai, two distinct propositions were made apparent: 1. That Israel had a divine call, and 2. That that call was to have consequences which concerned mankind at large. Both these propositions are of the nature of religious beliefs, and are essential to any description of Judaism. Far more essential are they than any dogmas as to the manner of the revelation. Whithersoever literary criticism may lead us in respect to

the interpretation of statements touching the circumstances of what is understood by revelation, there remains the hereditary impression among Jews that their distinct existence as Jews signifies a highly spiritual purpose, affecting the religious aspect of civilization. They are Jews in consequence of their conviction about the great event to which they owed their nationality. They have continued throughout the ages to be Jews by reason of the continuance of that conviction, and Judaism will cease when that conviction evaporates, but not before. No amount of ceremonialism can keep the Jewish religion alive without the faith that constitutes it. With that faith present, Judaism will not merely survive, but operate as a potent force among the religious influences of mankind. It will thus operate under, or in spite of, conditions of ever varying adhesion to ceremonialism. It will exist amid very much ceremonialism, and it will also exist with comparatively little. The ceremonialism is in part incidental to Judaism, in some measure it is indeed a mere accretion. In no case can Judaism be intelligently defined as a composition of ceremonialism. Every thoughtful person is bound to distinguish between the rules and regulations of an institution and the object for which the institution exists, and the source of its vitality. A mere outward observance, however rigid and minute, whether traceable to the "Auld Lang Syne" motive or any other not based on spiritual conviction, is no pledge whatever of the future of Judaism. But the form of Jewish adhesion which Mr. Zangwill says "gladdens the simple heart of the Russian pauper as he sings the hymns of hope and trust after his humble Friday night's meal," is not of the dead nature of mere outward ceremonialism, but it is the *living faith* which "gladdens the simple heart" of that Russian pauper. It is not ceremonialism by itself but the *living faith* behind it, which, as Mr. Zangwill truly says, "still solaces the foot-sore hawker, amid the jeers and blows of the drunkard and the bully, and transfigures the squalid Ghetto with celestial light." Where there is this vital faith among the members of the Jewish race there is Judaism, and it is the same in the villages of Russian Poland as in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; the same in New York City as in the East End of London, provided always that we are sure of the presence of that vital faith, and that those who are conscious of it are equally conscious of their fellowship with the great mass of Israel, scattered though it may have been through all historic times and through all known regions. The Jewish claim to the guardianship of eternal truth would never have

been established without the corresponding claim to the power of universal adaptability. The power of assimilation which is so remarkable in the Jewish race, their absolute capacity to become patriots of every country and to acquire every cast of mind, together with the fact that Judaism is present to-day, with equal evidence of organization, in Jerusalem and in Paris, in London and in Constantinople, in the Polish Ghettos and in the cities of the United States, are without doubt abundant testimony wherewith to establish this claim to the possession of eternal truth.

In conclusion, whatever may be the opinions of individuals as to the desirability or the obligation of certain views or observances from a Jewish point of view, Judaism is essentially a faith of the highest spiritual character. And although that faith does not make claims of the same kind as faith does in other religions, it does demand the most steady and resolute adherence to truths enunciated three thousand years ago.

Oswald John Simon.

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